

Niangua Basin

Conservation Opportunity Area



Ozark
Highlands



Barclay Spring is one of several springs that release cool underground water into the Niangua River.

Jim Rathert, Missouri Department of Conservation

The Niangua Basin Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) features forests, woodlands, savannas and prairies along the Niangua and Little Niangua rivers. Springs, sinkholes and fens are signs of the region's vast underground network of caves. Water moves rapidly between the surface and groundwater in cave landscapes, allowing pollutants to easily affect water quality.

The Little Niangua River contains one of the last remaining populations of the Niangua Darter, a federally endangered fish. Niangua darters live in clear upland creeks and small to medium-sized rivers with slight to moderate currents. They require continuously flowing streams with silt-free gravel and rock bottoms.

The Niangua Basin COA supports several high-use

recreational areas. The Niangua River is one of the most popular floating and fishing streams in the Missouri Ozarks. Numerous privately owned canoe liveries and campgrounds are located along the upper stretch of the Niangua River, with a noticeable absence of camping and canoe accesses in the Lower Niangua River (especially below Tunnel Dam). Ha Ha Tonka State Park features Ha Ha Tonka spring, sinkholes, caves, a natural bridge, castle ruins, hiking trails, picnic sites and shelters, two natural areas and a visitor's center. Bennett Spring State Park is the most visited trout park in Missouri.

Well known for its recreational fishing, hiking and canoeing, the Niangua Basin COA offers an excellent opportunity to keep these resources healthy.

Niangua Basin Conservation Strategies

- Restore woodlands, prairies, savannas and glades where appropriate.
- Restore bottomland forests and woodlands.
- Improve water quality and stream habitats.
- Conserve caves and springs.
- Implement appropriate recovery actions for eastern hellbender conservation.
- Provide public outreach and education, highlighting management activities.
- Increase recreational opportunities, especially in the lower part of the river (below Tunnel Dam), encouraging low impact activities such as canoeing and hiking.



Paul Nelson, U.S. Forest Service

Bennett Spring Savanna (owned by The Nature Conservancy) displays many native grasses and wildflowers. Its history of frequent ground fires goes back more than 50 years.

Priority Research and Inventory Needs

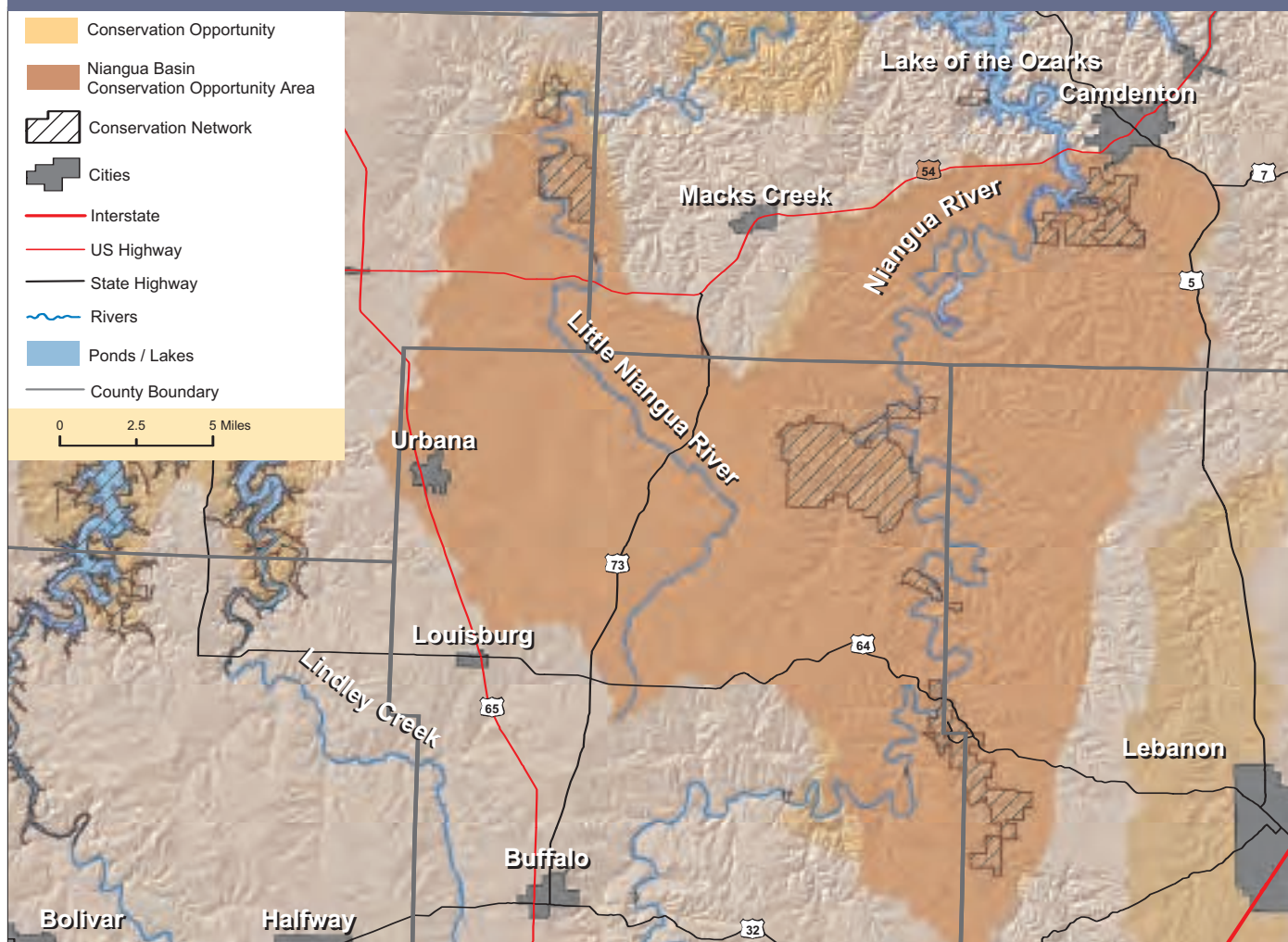
- Inventory targeted natural communities.
- Determine indicator plants and animals related to high quality terrestrial and aquatic natural communities.
- Assess and inventory environmental threats.
- Assess and inventory species of conservation concern.
- Determine ecological landtypes (ELT) and ELT phases.

Conservation Partners

Existing: The Nature Conservancy – Missouri Chapter (TNC); Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); Laclede County Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS); Laclede County Soil and Water Conservation District; Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR); Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)

Potential: Audubon Missouri; Missouri Prairie Foundation; American Fisheries Society; National Wild Turkey Federation; Niangua River Paddlers Association; Heart of America Fly Fishers; Missouri cave grottos; Stream Teams; Ozark Regional Land Trust; private landowners

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Funding Sources

Existing: TNC annual budget; DNR annual budget; MDC annual budget; MDC Wildlife Diversity Funds; MDC Private Lands Cost Share Program; USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program; USFWS Fish Passage Program; MCHF Stream Stewardship Trust Fund; Farm Service Agency Conservation Reserve Program; NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program; NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Promising Future Sources: MDC State Wildlife Grants; MDC Landowner Incentive Program; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grants

Niangua darters are sensitive to water pollution and sedimentation. Landowners can help Niangua darters by planting trees along stream banks and moving cattle watering areas into pastures, away from streams.

Existing Conservation Network

Lead Mine Conservation Area; Ha Ha Tonka State Park (Ha Ha Tonka Savanna Natural Area, Ha Ha Tonka Karst Natural Area); Bennett Spring State Park (Bennett Spring Fish Hatchery and Trout Park, Bennett Spring Hanging Fen Natural Area); Mule Shoe Conservation Area; Berry Bluff Conservation Area; Barclay Conservation Area; Coffin Cave Conservation Area; Bennett Spring Savanna Preserve; Bennett Spring Access; Prosperine Access; Moon Valley Access; Branch Towersite; Plad Towersite



Jim Rathert, Missouri Department of Conservation

Prescribed Fire



A fire line at Ha Ha Tonka State Park demonstrates the difference that fire makes in Ozark woodlands. The area on the right was burned 10 times in 20 years prior to this photo, compared to the left side that has had no fire management for decades.

Paul W. Nelson, U.S. Forest Service

Conservation Challenges

The Niangua Basin COA provides an excellent opportunity to restore woodland, savanna and Ozark stream habitats. Many native grasslands, savannas and woodlands have been converted to nonnative pasture or cut over and allowed to grow up in dense timber in the absence of fire. Restoration of the native grassland and woodland landscape will not

only benefit native plants and animals, but can also provide forage and timber resources and enhance watershed protection and tourism. Potential challenges to conservation success include limited landowner participation, funding, staff time and the coordination and ability of multiple agencies and organizations to work together.

To learn more about the Niangua Basin Conservation Opportunity Area, please contact:



Missouri Department of Conservation
Wildlife Division
P.O. Box 180
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180